

# WHO'S GUILTY?

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Novelization By  
Mrs. Wilson Woodrow

## Story No. 2

### "THE TIGHT REIN"

The second of a series of separate stories dealing with the commission of crimes, inviting judgment upon both actual guilt and real responsibility.

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**J**EREMIAH MCCALL came to America from his Loch Leven moor when he was five years old. He came by steamer. When he was fifty-five he could easily have bought the ship that had brought him to the land of the free and the home of the dollars.

In this half century of tireless toil, he had gained much money and had bartered for it almost everything that most men would consider worth while. He was a strong man in the community, a monument of stony respectability, a leader in local finance and politics, an employer of many hundred less fortunate people.

The years that had made him rich had also made him hard and uncompromising and as self-willed as any Roman emperor. And he actually ruled as an emperor—in his home, in his great silk mill, in his social circle. His word was law.

Square-built, heavy-jawed, massive, he affected the old fashion of wearing a long beard and no mustache. This he did for no better reason than that his father, fifty years earlier, had done the same thing and his grandfather before him.

When he still was the pushy aggressive superintendent of the mill he afterward owned, Jeremiah McCall had committed the one weak folly of his life—a folly for which he was much ashamed, then and ever after. He had fallen in love with a pretty operative in the mill and he had married her.

She was a gentle, timid little girl, this wife the future emperor had chosen. And she lived in eternal terror of her dominating husband. Even after he carried her on to wealth and social leadership, she was still terrified and unhappy. At last she had the good luck to die, leaving one child, a son named Jock.

Jock McCall inherited his mother's good looks and charm of manner. He inherited, too, some of her timidity. And this quality had been intensified, in boyhood, by his father's bullying.

Jeremiah had great hopes for this son of his. He wanted the boy to become a leader of men, like himself. He wanted him fitted to rule the McCall dynasty, some day, and to carry on the work his father had begun. Above all, he dreaded lest the lad should fall into the idleness and dissipation that beset rich men's sons.

With this in view, he put Jock through a course of training that might well have broken the spirit of an army mule. Apart from the rigid home discipline he made Jock start at the very bottom of the silk business and work long hours, six days a week, for fifty-two weeks a year. And he had him not only in wages but money might prove a temptation to lure him away from the joys of labor and from rectitude.

Jeremiah insisted that Jock should lodge and dress like a gentleman, and that he should have a good worker—intelligent, quick, industrious. He hated the mill routine, but he stuck to it, because he dared not cross his father's wishes by doing anything else.

But at last a gleam of sunlight flashed into the drab monotony of his life. That was the day Amy Prentice came to work in the McCall silk mill.

Amy was a dainty, winsome slip of a girl with a little flower-face and great dark eyes and a halo of sunny hair. Jock thought she was quite the most lovely and adorable person on earth. Perhaps he was right.

At any rate, he was fore finding himself near her in the office on a spare minute throughout the day, or snatching the opportunity for a brief chat with her when he could arrange to meet her on the way to and from work.

Once or twice, when he could gain her consent, he called in her invalid mother and herself at their bright little flat in the opulent quarters of Silk City. And, bit by bit, he could see that Amy was beginning to return his fondness for her.

One morning in early spring Jock stopped at his father's office on the way to his own department of the mill. Jeremiah McCall was at his desk. He had been there since sunrise working harder in his own way than any of his seven hundred employees. He believed it was a sin for a business man to stay in bed later than half-past five in the morning.

Jeremiah looked up with a curt nod as his son came in.

"Morning, Jock," he said briefly.

"What do you want now?"

"I'd like a little cash," said the boy, with some hesitation.

"I gave you three dollars last week," replied Jeremiah. "Have you wasted it all?"

"Yes, sir," returned Jock, stifling a grin. "That was seven days ago. I wasted sixty cents of it on carfare. Another forty went into the collection plate last Sunday. I don't suppose you want an itemized account of the rest."

"Sixty cents on carfare?" complained Jeremiah. "When we live barely three miles from the mill? What's a three-mile walk, twice a day, to a strong young man like you?"

"It's six miles, day," answered Jock. "Or at four miles an hour, it's an hour and a half of time. I thought I could find more value for my time here at the mill, than by walking away at six or eight cents an hour."

This answer (which Jock had carefully thought out in order to play his father's card of efficiency) seemed to please the older man. He nodded approval and took from a metal box in a desk drawer a sheaf of bills of large denomination. Jock's eyes lit up at the prospect of a change of some real spending money.

Carefully going through the handful of currency, however, Jeremiah at last discovered in it, among the twenties and fifties, a solitary two-dollar bill. He separated this from the rest and passed it over to his cheerful son.

"Don't squander it foolishly," he exhorted. "A penny saved is a penny earned."

"Father!" broke out Jock, stung to revolt. "I hate to come begging to you every time I want a cent. It's humiliating."

"That's the way of the world," said Jeremiah. "You must learn to live on what you can get. I don't want to see you a pauper."

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needed something to palliate the recent interview.

A foreman was beside her and she was pointing out to him that the lever which stopped and started the machine had become jammed. The foreman took hold of the lever and tried to manipulate it. It was stuck, and he tugged hard at it.

At that moment he caught sight of Jock, who was but a step or two away. Resting one hand on the needle rack, she rose to greet him. As he did so, the foreman whose back was toward her, gave the lever a final savage wrench.

The obstruction yielded to his tug. With a noisy whir, the machinery started. Jack saw the girl's peril, but his cry of warning and his forward spring was too late. Down swept the set of needles onto the rack. One of them drove its way through the side of the girl's hand, near the wrist.

Any other person, with a gasp of pain, and recoiled, half screaming, calling an ambulance, or even to send for a carriage. Weak and shaken as she was, she insisted on walking home.

There, with the help of one of the girls, she washed out the ragged wound and bound it up as best he could. Amy refused to allow him to call an ambulance, or even to send for a carriage. Weak and shaken as she was, she insisted on walking home.

He put on his hat and coat and, despite her protests, declared he was going to see her to her own door. On the way, he made her stop at the office of the McCall physician and had her wound properly dressed. Then, leaving her with her mother, he started back to work.

Passing a provision store on the way, he spent his only two dollars on a basket of fruit, which he himself carried to the injured Amy. It was the first time he had ever been able to buy a present for a girl.

His father's wish to see him at once. With sinking heart Jock went to Jeremiah McCall's private office. He found the great man stamping back and forth on the carpetless floor, his hands behind his back and his face purple with wrath.

"What's this I hear about your letting a girl out of the mill, after she's been awkward enough to get herself hurt?" he snarled.

"Her machine was unsafe," declared Jock. "The lever was defective. To save money you bought a lot of cheap stuff last time, and the other machines were overhauled. And this was part of it. If the machine had been in proper condition she wouldn't have been hurt."

She had a clear case, under the Employers' Liability Act. And—

"A clear case!" snorted Jeremiah. "Hear the numbskull talk! How many clear cases do you ever hear of my having to settle? Employers' Liability Act? Not a single one. And hurt employees have to sign general waivers before they can sue. You'd better get your head out of the clouds."

"What am I going to pay them out of?" he asked. "Out of my high wages here or out of the fat rolls of pocket money you dole out to me?"

"I can't," said Jock, uneasily. "I haven't got it."

"You've spent two dollars in this short time?" shrieked Jeremiah, his thrifty soul shocked to the very foundations at thought of such extravagance.

"What did you spend it on?" demanded his father.

Jock hesitated. There was one magnificent trait he had inherited from his Scotch ancestors—the unbreakable habit of truth telling. He had always received scant credit at home for this virtue, but his luckless veracity had forever gotten him into trouble with his father.

He was sorely tempted to lie now and avoid the truth, but the truth must bring down upon him. As he still hesitated, his father repeated with a dawning suspicion.

"What did you spend it on?"

"Fruit," said Jock's sulky answer. "For a girl."

A smile of genuine gratification

placed by a certain deadly calm.

"Go back to your work," he ordered. "Your customary formula for closing an office interview with Jock. The boy departed, more frightened by his father's rage than he would have been by a volley of rage.

Next morning, her injured hand bound up, Amy Prentice reported as usual at the mill for work. The foreman of her room caught sight of her as she came in.

"Go to the pay window," he said in a tone far less unkind than his words. "and get your time."

"I'm-I'm surely not discharged?" she asked in dismay.

"That's the answer," said the foreman, turning away. "You're one of the best workers in the room."

"But what have I done?" she asked. "If it's because I took the day off yesterday, I was not able to work. I was injured. You can take the day's wages out of my week's pay. I don't discharge me! Mother and I need the money so. She's been ill so long and it took all our savings. I'll work for less wages if you will."

"You've got to go," said the foreman. "You've got to go. Boss's orders."

Jock, crossing a hallway in the mill, ten minutes later, almost ran into Amy. The girl, her eyes glistening with tears, was hurrying toward the street door. She had on her hat and jacket.

"What's the matter?" he asked in alarm as he sought to stop her. "Is the poor hand worse? Are you ill?"

"I'm discharged," she answered, fighting back the tears.

"Discharged? Nonsense! There must be some mistake. If—"

"There isn't any mistake," she denied, unhappily. The foreman said Mr. McCall had ordered me discharged. I went to see Mr. McCall myself, just now, to ask why. But he wouldn't listen to me. He told me to get out of his office. And he'd have me driven out of Silk City, too, before he'd give me a reference. Oh, what you suppose makes him treat me so?"

Jock could not answer, but the truth flashed into his mind, even as she spoke. He knew now why his father had said no more to him about the gift of fruit. He knew, too, the cold vengeance of Jeremiah McCall's temper.

"I can't see why," she went on. "I don't ask favors of him or of anybody. All I ask is a chance to do a good day's work and to support my mother and myself. And, without a reference from him, how can I get work?"

"I can solve that problem for you, anyhow," he answered brightening a little as an idea came to him. "Wait here a moment, please."

He ran to a telephone in the adjoining room and called up the janitor of Jordan & Co., giving the janitor his name and asking for Mr. Peter Jordan, his father's old friend.

"Mr. Jordan," he said, as the other's voice called a cheerful good morning to him over the wire, "Will you do me a big favor?"

"Anything short of my last nickel!" replied Jordan, who was sincerely fond of his old friend's son.

"There is a girl—Miss Amy Prentice—who is a skilled operative and is one of the best employees we've ever had. She's perfect in every way. Her perfect satisfaction, and her personal character is as high as your own daughter's. For reasons that I won't take your time by explaining over the wire, she is leaving us. As a favor to me, will you give her a job?"

"I'll vouch for her in every way. Will you give her work?"

"Why, of course," came the hearty answer. "Send her along; we're short-handed in two departments, anyhow. I'll be glad to have any one you people praise so. That's good enough recommendation for me."

Jock hurried back to Amy with the glad news. Her white face flushed with gratitude and happiness.

"Oh, thank you a million times! A million times!" she cried, ecstatically. "It is splendid of you to come to my aid like this! I'll never forget it as long as I live. Why are you so good to an unlucky girl?"

"I think you know why," he answered tenderly, her hand in his. "If you don't, I'm going to tell you some day. I have no right to tell you now. But, as soon as I can make my father or some other employer pay me a living wage, I'll have the right to speak. And then—"

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Their eyes met in a long, long look of understanding and trust. Then Amy's glance fell before his ardent gaze. She blushed in embarrassment and gently drew her hand from his clasp.

"When the day comes," she whispered, "I shall be waiting—Jock."

Two days later, Peter Jordan came to meet his friend Jeremiah McCall at luncheon and balled him with the announcement:

"Well, your little protégée, Amy Prentice, takes hold finely. Her foreman tells me she's a wonder. I'm glad you sent her over to me. But why on earth did you let such a treasure go?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, man," said Jeremiah, stiffly.

Before his informant had finished speaking, his plan had been formed. On the morrow he would go to New York. He would search high and low. He would hire detectives, if need be. He would visit every employment agency, every factory, every big store, for news of her. He would find her. He must find her.

Q. How could he find her? He could not be in actual want or he could not have afforded to visit a theatre. And the mill-girl's sister had seen her coming out of one of the city's theatres. He could not obtain a word of explanation.

Bravely, that day and for days thereafter, the bewildered girl went from mill to mill, seeking work. For some unknown reason, she met curtness and refusal everywhere—perhaps because the mills were full and times were slack; perhaps because she could show no references; perhaps—because the deadly "black-list" had been used effectively against her.

At last, with starvation ever creeping nearer and nearer to her, she decided to leave the city where a ban seemed to have been placed upon her services and look for work in New York. Surely, in the metropolis there must be some place for a strong and capable toiler.

She longed to see Jock McCall once more, to explain to him why she was going away, but she knew how unhappy he would be. He would be angry and she would be waiting for him whenever he should be able to claim her. But she knew how unhappy he would be. He would be angry and she would be waiting for him whenever he should be able to claim her.

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**Jeremiah McCall, next morning, read the account of what the newspaper termed the "death pact" of Jock and Amy. Shivering with ague, the stricken old man lifted his eyes. And, in the motion, his glance fell with a new terror on the motto he had so smugly placed on his office wall: "The Wages of Sin Is Death!"**

Moved by idle curiosity, he turned in at a garishly illuminated set of doors, in the wake of a party of men and women who were in evening dress.

Once inside, he stood for a moment confused by the lights and noise and the jolly din of the place. His gaze roved in wonder over the acres of soiled tables, with their groups of women in faded, décolleté and their wooden enlaced men.

And, all at once, his idle glance was riveted at a table near the doorway where he was standing. Four people were seated at the table, and their faces were lit up with the glow of large and flamboyantly made up and was flirting perversely with a callow youth who leaned across, right lovingly, to catch her every word.

The other couple were a gray-haired, puffy-faced man of evident wealth and a slender young woman in black evening dress. The gray-haired man sat facing the door. The girl's back was turned toward Jock.

The police of her dainty head and the high yellow hair brought a strange thrill to the onetime lad. Scarcely realizing what he did, he took an impulsive step or two forward and halted at her side. The girl looked up.

"Amy!" gasped Jock from between ashen lips. "Amy!"

She was dressed in the extreme fashion of the day, with all her fingers and at her throat. But in spite of such amazing disguise he knew her. And his heart cried out to her in the incoherently spoken words.

"I gave my life to forget it," she broke out in sudden vehemence. "But I'll never be able to forget. Oh, Jock, what was I to do? I tried so hard to keep straight, to find honest work. But the terrible city was too much for me. If I had had only myself to think of, I'd have ended it in the river. But I couldn't let mother suffer. She is an invalid. She needs me. I can't leave her. I can't make her sick room life bearable. Without the right care she would die. She needed what only money could give her. And I supply her with the money."

"Amy! I—"

"She doesn't know. She must never know. She thinks I have a position here. A girl from Silk City met me last week as I was coming from a matinee. She spoke to me, and I could see she suspected. I was so afraid mother would hear of it."

"Listen, dearest," he interposed. "The past is dead—for both of us. We're going to forget it all, you and I. To-morrow morning you are going to start a new life—a glorious new life, together, my darling."

Again he lifted his head, and for a space the lovers clung together, the two little children who are frightened and seek to comfort each other.

"Tell the chauffeur to drive to my apartment," she said presently, giving the address. "I am going home to take off this jewelry and to change into my nightgown. And I'll put on the clothes I wore when I came to work. We'll start afresh, with nothing to remind us of what's happened. Oh, Jock, I didn't think there were such men as you left in this rotten old world!"

She called an address to the taxi and the gray-haired man, who had evidently been waiting for her, stepped in front of an uptown apartment house with a gaudy entrance. Jock followed the girl indoors, into an antechamber, and thence to a fourth floor apartment which she opened with a latchkey.

"Wait here," she said, leading him into a freshly furnished little reception room. "I'll take me ten minutes to change into the old clothes."

Jock, looking about the place, with its display of tasteless and garish extravagance, could not repress a shudder. Amy noted it and said timidly:

"I know how you feel about it, dear. But we'll be away from it in a few minutes. You can't hate it all worse than I do. Or you can't. I have hated it every hour. Say you forgive me, Jock. She pleaded. "Say it!"

"Forgive you?" he echoed, taking her into his arms. "Why, Amy, I love you!"

"I'm safe here in your dear arm," she said, blissfully. "I don't—"

On the threshold, door flew open. The gray-haired man had knocked down. Crazy with drink and jealous fury, he glared mutely at them for a moment, his face working grotesquely, his fat lips writhing back from his yellowed teeth.

Then before either of them could guess his intent, he whipped out a pistol and leveled it at them.

Amy threw herself in front of her lover. And as she did so the man fired.

With a choking cry of "Jock! Jock, darling," she sank to the floor, a wound above the heart.

Jock, insane now as was his foe, rushed blindly at the murderer. But a second bullet stopped him, midway. He reeled, straightened himself, a look of drowsy wonder in his face, then collapsed lifeless at his enemy's feet.

The murderer glanced nervously about him as if waking from a bad dream. Then, at sound of faint running feet, he thrust the pistol into a doorway, turned and fled down the hallway.

Amy Prentice raised her head and with glazing eyes she looked across at her dead lover. By stark force of will she dragged herself to where he lay.

Thus the house's other tenants found them.

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"The Wages of Sin Is Death!"

(End of Second Story.)

**THE THIRD "WHO'S GUILTY" STORY**  
**"THE TANGLED WEB"**  
WILL BE PUBLISHED THURSDAY, MAY 18